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William Paterson Faculty:

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Welcome back to spring semester!

This past week we had the opportunity to gather together to hear from President Waldron as she welcomed us back to campus for spring 2015. We heard about some of our successes, were introduced to new faculty and staff on campus, recognized those who have retired and are leaving William Paterson, and were reminded of the challenges and opportunities that await us this spring and beyond. In this message I want to spend a little more time looking at some of our academic successes and continuing our conversation about what challenges await and what directions we may wish to seek.

As the President noted, we are having some success in improving our student retention and graduation numbers. Doing so is important not only because of what this means to our students, but also because we are increasingly and publicly being evaluated by these (and other) metrics, and it is increasingly likely that our dwindling public funding will be tied in some fashion to our performance on these and other numbers. As politicians and the media continue to focus on these types of measurements, so too will our students and their parents. Students and parents will increasingly look to some of these numbers in their decision as to what school they wish to attend. Our strong academic programs, your excellence as faculty in the classroom and in research and service—these could potentially be undercut in public perception if we fail to continue to improve our student success numbers. So it is good that we are showing improvement, and it is vital that we continue to do so for the strong future of the university and for our ability to attract and retain the students we want and need.

We have seen these improvements:

- Our 6-year graduation rate crossed the 50% threshold, going to 50.9%. This is the third year in a row we have shown an increase.
- Our 4-year graduation rate moved to 21.2%, also the third year in a row we have shown an increase. We still significantly trail our peer institutions who work with similar students, so there is still room for improvement—but we are progressing.
- Retention from first to second year for first-time, full-time students moved to 76.6%. This is slightly above national norms, but again, our peer institutions who work with similar students retain students at rates reaching 83%—room to grow and progress to sustain.

As a university, we have also been successful in the development and implementation of new and enhanced academic programs. We are recruiting this year our first class for the PsyD program with students set to start the program this fall. We have also received final state approval for the MA in Higher Education Administration and the MEd in Middle Level Education, and both of these programs are being implemented by the College of Education. A new Masters of Public Health, with a concentration in Health Communication, is moving through the approval process, and we hope to have this program fully approved through the state by the end of this year, and the BS in Computer Information Technology is in final state review. There have also been numerous changes and enhancements to undergraduate degree programs, as well as the development of new disciplinary and inter-disciplinary minors.

Later in this document, I discuss the need for us to continue to look at our curriculum to make sure that we are offering academic programs that meet student need and reflect the continuing changes in our disciplines. I hope as well that we continue to look at how we can meet student need through new degrees, new minors, graduate and undergraduate certificates, and changes to our existing academic programs. Change is one of the few constants, and we need to manage our changes effectively.

Often in a message such as this, I take the time to highlight some of the successes of the faculty—as there are always so many good stories from which to pick. The President, however (per the privilege of the President) has beaten me to the punch. I will just note that I am looking forward to later this spring when we will get a chance to celebrate many more of you when we hold our annual Research and Scholarship Day

We are moving in a good direction, but there are still challenges and opportunities ahead. In the remainder of this document, I'd like to share some thoughts on student success, assessment, accreditation and student learning, sustaining our efforts with current resources, and communication and campus climate.

### **Student Success**

At William Paterson, we define student success as *“making sure that our students are learning what we say they are learning, have the skills and abilities we say they should have, are successfully progressing through their education, and are successfully graduating in a timely fashion.”*

There are four parts to this definition, and each part is essential for student success.

First, we must make sure that our students are learning what we say they are learning. What does this mean? It means that our academic degrees, our majors, and our courses all have student learning outcomes. We publicly state what it is we expect from our students. We tell them and our public that we have expectations—high expectations—of our students in terms of their academic performance.

Student learning is the bedrock of any student success program. Our primary responsibility as educators is to make sure that our students are learning. No other part of student success is sufficient in the absence of student learning.

At William Paterson we have supported student learning in a variety of ways—first and foremost through the care, experience and dedication of you, our faculty. We have also supported student learning with numerous academic support programs at the department level and through the Academic Success Center in the Office of Academic Development. We need to keep our focus on student learning and continue to support our students so they can learn—and master—the knowledge they need. We will need to continue to work together and use what resources we have so that students are given the opportunity and support to learn. Student Success starts with learning.

With learning at the core of student success, we also need to be mindful of the needs of our students to be able to reach educational, professional and personal goals in a timely fashion and with as few hindrances as possible. We need to help our students complete their degrees in a timely manner and while incurring as little debt as possible. Students who graduate from William Paterson (or from any university, for that matter), weighed down with significant student loans are facing an even more difficult transition to the next phase of their lives. Faced with years of paying off student loans, our graduates may find it difficult to move into this next stage of life, or may feel the need to limit employment choices to only those careers that allow them to start this new life AND pay off student loans. Our graduates may decide that they cannot continue their education at a graduate or professional school.

This is why student success also means helping our students progress in a timely fashion and complete their education in a timely fashion. As a university, we need to do what we can so that our students can afford to complete their degree and so that students have the time to study and learn while completing their degrees.

We are taking steps to do this. We have instituted Student Success Scholarships, providing additional financial support to students who are on track and on time, completing a minimum of 30 credits each academic year with a minimum GPA of 3.0. We have increased the amount and availability of academic support services, at both the department and college level. We have developed the Office of Sophomore and Junior Experience to help coordinate some of these efforts. At a time when the majority of our students are transfer students, we have developed the Office of Transfer Student Experience, so that, in addition to their academic degree homes, transfer students have a point of contact for their unique needs. We have implemented college-based professional advisors, and are working with all advisors on training and professional development for advisors. We are implementing Degree Works, so that students and advisors have a powerful tool to help manage their education.

These are just some of the steps we are taking to help student success—and of course we need to do more.

So in light of our desire to help students succeed, I offer these challenges:

- 1) Let's think about how we can continue to enhance our academic offerings in terms of degrees and in terms of what we teach in our academic programs. You as faculty are the experts and curriculum is your domain. Let's continue to review our academic offerings to see that we offer the education our students need, and that we reflect the changing nature of our disciplines.

Let's also continue to review how we teach and how our students learn. Here at William Paterson we have such a strong support program for faculty, both in the Center for Teaching Excellence and in the Center for Teaching and Learning with Technology. Let's use these strengths to keep our focus on student learning and student success.

- 2) Let's also think about how we could possibly address student success through how we schedule our classes and offer our programs. We need to look carefully at the scope and sequence of our degree offerings, looking to make sure that we are able to offer the courses our students need to complete their degrees in a manner that does not create unnecessary hindrances. Think about the mix of required courses and elective courses, and keep working to minimize any conflicts in scheduling of required courses. We know that our students have busy lives, and that the majority of our students commute to campus for their classes. I know that you as faculty are aware of this, so let's keep our focus on managing our academic offerings for the benefit of our students. As will be noted later in this message, course scheduling and sequencing also needs to be done in alignment with the financial resources with which we have to work. We need to support our students with the resources we have available.
- 3) Let's also think about how we can enhance our academic and student support services to help students succeed. We have numerous tutoring and other academic support programs, and these are a key part of what we do for our students here at William Paterson. Are there areas where we can do more? Are there areas where we can do better? Teaching and helping students learn is what we do. So—please think about what we as a university can do, and what you, in your classes, your departments, your colleges, can do.

In offering these challenges, I also can offer some support. While it is often tempting to say that all we need is more resources, we do not have all the additional resources that people may believe are needed. We work with the resources we have.

One resource we do have is a small amount of funding that is available to support activities designed to improve and enhance student success. As part of the FY15 budgeting process, \$50,000 was allocated for student success support. Some of these funds have already been allotted, but the majority of the funding remains available to help support student success initiatives. These funds are managed collaboratively by the Office of the Provost, Enrollment Management and Student Development, and these funds are designed to help explore and jumpstart ideas and activities that will enhance student success, including areas of curricular development and redesign, teaching and learning, academic and student support, and enhanced retention and graduation. A more formal announcement and process for submitting requests for these funds will follow shortly.

### **Assessment, Accreditation and Student Learning**

This spring a small group of faculty, staff and administrators will begin to lead the work on our 2016 Middle States Commission on Higher Education Program Review Report (PRR). The PRR is a critical element of our regional accreditation efforts, and will need to involve all of our campus in its development. The PRR is not just a mid-term review of our regional accreditation. It is a report from the University verifying that we should continue to be accredited by Middle States.

Just as importantly, the work of this group will start laying the groundwork for our 2021 decennial report to Middle States. Just as we at William Paterson are increasingly held to more and higher accountability standards, so are our accrediting bodies, regional and disciplinary. As a result, the work we need to do to maintain accreditation also grows. Accreditation is less and less a process that takes place every 5 or 10 years, and more and more an ongoing process of continuous improvement. This means we need to always be engaging in ongoing assessment, review, reflection and activity. Our regional accreditors, and our disciplinary accreditors, are focusing less on historical and traditional measures of quality (inputs such as how many volumes we have in the library, how many of our faculty hold a terminal degree, how our degree programs are developed) and more on outputs: Can we document that our students are learning what we say they are learning (and course grades are not sufficient documentation)? Do our students progress through their degree programs and graduate in a timely fashion? Are our graduates being employed in careers relevant to their degrees or being accepted into graduate programs?

Assessment and accreditation continue to have significant roles in higher education. We are in the era of accountability, and it is important that we at William Paterson take a proactive role in this. It is better to act than to react and better to control the process than have to play by someone else's rules.

We need to continue our push on student learning assessment. We have put in place an assessment plan for our University Common Core. We have to implement this plan and we have to show that we assess student learning, that we reflect and act upon what we learn from these assessments, and that the results of these assessments drive our resource allocation. The mantra of assessment and accreditation remains the same—closing the loop. Clear and public outcomes of student learning and student success (academically and across the university); clear, consistent and regular assessments based on these outcomes; review and reflection on the assessment data; and decisions on how we use our resources based on these assessments.



## **Supporting Our Work with Available Resources**

We all know that we have been asked to continue to do our work, to help our students succeed, to maintain our professional growth—all of this—and we have been asked to do so with the financial resources available to us. The money the state provides us has remained flat for the past few years (and following significant declines in the years prior). Flat as a term hides the fact that our costs continue to rise—so flat really means reductions. At the same time, our students and their families are increasingly stretched financially. They have more and more trouble with paying tuition and all the other costs associated with their education. This means we are very limited in what we can do in terms of tuition increases—and again, at a time when tuition covers more and more of the cost of education while state support covers less and less.

Even in this environment, as a university, we have worked hard at providing as many resources as we can. We have grown from 380 full-time faculty in 2010 to 404 in 2014, an increase of 6%, and we have done so even as enrollment at the university has declined by a little over 2%. As the President noted, we have also increased the number of sabbatical awards, allowing for faculty to have more sustained and focused time to devote to research scholarship, creative activity and professional growth. We continue to support faculty research with the Assigned Release Time (ART) program, and the Career Development and Tuition Waiver Reimbursement Programs are also continuing.

The university is also working to support faculty travel for research and scholarship. In the past five years, the university has increased support for academic travel 36% to over \$650,000. Additional travel support from state, federal and other grants added another \$250,000 in the last year, meaning there was over \$900,000 of support for academic travel. In addition, following the spring 2014 budget process, the decision was made to add an additional \$50,000 to support student research initiatives, including research partnerships between students and faculty.

Faculty work hard. You teach, you support students, you engage in service and you work on your research, scholarship and creative activities. University support for these activities is essential, and we are working to maintain this support.

As noted, maintaining this level of support is becoming more difficult as available resources dwindle. Tuition and fees make up the majority of our available budget, and, as we know, overall university enrollment has been flat to slightly declining in the past few years. We have a number of programs that are growing significantly, but we also have programs that do not have these same levels of growth, and overall our enrollments are not increasing. With flat state dollars (and flat really means decrease) and flat tuition revenue, we need to work hard at using our resources as well as we can. Yes, we also need to do what we can to increase available resources—seeking additional grant dollars, seeking more private support, growing our enrollment and retaining more of the students we enroll. All of these are important and all of these are part of our ongoing efforts. As the President noted in her spring address,

we are seeing additional outside support, especially for student scholarships—and every scholarship dollar makes it more likely a student can spend more time studying, learning and progressing through his or her education. As we work to grow, we must also work at sustaining the university.

Many of the discussions we are having on campus about such issues as adjunct and overload budget, student credit hours, class sizes, minimum and maximum course enrollments are discussions that are at the crossroads of student success and available resources. The principle is actually quite basic: In all that we do, we must achieve student success through the effective use of available resources. And while that principle is easily stated, the application is never that simple.

In our decision-making as a university, we look to the best ways to achieve student success knowing that the resources we have available—at least in terms of financial budget—are limited. We have to deliberate and choose wisely in how we allocate our resources. By far, the majority of our financial resources go toward fixed costs, including salaries of all of the members of the university. Funds to add additional support for new programs or to bolster support for growing programs are rare.

As a university, then, we need to look at how we can best manage our resources, and part of that is always looking closely at how we use these resources. Class size, student credit hours, faculty-student ratios—all of these are metrics that we need to look at to see how we use our resources. And as we look at these metrics, we also always balance them with the need to help our students succeed. Our goal is not and never will be simply to increase class sizes. Our goal—and a necessity—is to use what resources we have in a manner that is sustainable and that provides for student success.

So as we look at the metrics, what we see are some concerns in terms of sustainability. At the undergraduate level, average class size has dropped over 13% in the past five years, from 21.3 to 18.4. When graduate classes are factored in, the drop is from 14.2 to 12.8, a drop of almost 10%. Student credit hours taught, which is probably a more realistic and accurate metric, also shows a decline of about 2.5%, at the undergraduate level, from 131,267 in fall of 2010 to 127,790 in the fall of 2014. The drop in student credit hours is not surprising—we have fewer students. The drop in average class size is not as easily correlated. As we have fewer students at the university, that does not necessarily equate with a drop in average class size. One other metric sheds a little more light on this. In the same time period in which average class size and student credit hours are declining, the number of sections taught is increasing, from 2122 in fall of 2010 (undergraduate) to 2344 in fall of 2014, an increase of over 10%.

In sum: We have increased full-time faculty. We have increased adjunct credit hours. We have a decrease in average class sizes, a decrease in student credit hours, and an increase in the number of sections. We have more people teaching more courses to fewer students. On a purely resource management review, this is a dangerous model and one that is not sustainable. But this is only one part of the principle. Remember: we must always balance resource use and student success. We are not just about the bottom line (though the bottom line certainly matters in terms of our future); we are also about student learning.

As we continue our discussions about these issues, we need to take both parts of the principle into consideration: How do we use the resources we have to support student success? Our resources are

limited, and we must have student success. What we need to work toward is effective student learning with efficient use of available resources. That is not a new idea. Student learning is always what we care about. Effective use of resources is something that takes more and more of our attention as the economics of higher education becomes more and more constrained.

### **Communication and Campus Climate**

The need to be able to have productive discussions about issues such as how we use our resources most effectively is a good transition to the final topic in this message.

We are educators. We know that to be good teachers requires that our classrooms (whether physical or virtual) are places where students and professors are free to discuss all issues relevant to the class, and to do so knowing that the discussion is about ideas. We learn through exchanges of information and opinion.

We need this same tone in our campus discussions as well.

I am quite confident that given over 400 full-time faculty, additional adjunct faculty, administrators, staff and students, we will always have differences of opinion, and we will often have disagreements over the direction we are heading and the steps we are taking to get there. That is fine. We can and should be able to disagree, and we can and should be able to do so in a way that allows for honest disagreement. Disagreement shows we care about what matters.

As we engage in communication about important issues, I hope we can do so in a manner that allows us to move forward. There are so many issues and concerns facing higher education today, and we need to be addressing these issues so that we can keep the focus on our students.

In the still short time I have been here at William Paterson, I have seen and heard so many examples of how you as faculty make a difference for our students. I know that is what motivates you as we struggle with all the demands placed on us.

As Provost, I also care about making a difference for our students. Much of my day is devoted to responding to individual student concerns from across the university, and doing what I can to help our students succeed in their education. I no longer get the one to one interaction that I had as a faculty member, but that does not change what is important—our students.

At each orientation session I remind students of a simple fact—all of us at William Paterson are here because of our students. Without our students, none of us would be here.

I know that faculty understand this, and I hope that we can all keep this in mind as we discuss these important issues. While we can and will disagree about how best to help our students learn, we should not be in disagreement that helping our students learn is why we are here.

This spring we will continue discussions on issues that are very contentious and very important to all of us. Whether at Faculty Senate, meetings with Senate Councils, meeting with Chairs and Graduate



Program Directors, Student Success Forums, Department and College Meetings, or individual meetings with faculty, I am ready to discuss these issues, and I look forward to productive discussions.

As we are a large university, and there are few if any venues or events where we all can be present at the same time, I also want to try additional ways to communicate.

First, we have done some redesign of the Office of the Provost website (<http://www.wpunj.edu/provost/>). We are doing this to try to make this a resource and one-stop shop for questions related to academic issues—curriculum, policy, faculty support. This redesign will continue to be ongoing, so if you have questions, concerns and suggestions, please pass them on to our webmaster—which is me—so it is a work in progress.

Secondly, as you take the time to visit our site, please also note a couple of other options for communication. For those of you who are into these sorts of things, please feel free to follow me on Twitter (and please let me know of any good news you would like me to tweet about—I may not have the followers that Katy Perry has—currently #1 at 63,399,724 followers—but some people do follow me). You can also see a link to a blog account. I plan to use this as a little more informal way to have exchanges about the issues facing higher education, at William Paterson and elsewhere. Blogs do have a reply feature, so if you wish, please stop by.

None of this takes the place of face to face communication. I will keep trying to get away from my computer and out to campus so we can talk. I am open to invitations to any of your departmental activities to which you wish to invite me.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this message. Have a good spring semester, and we will see you around campus.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized first name followed by a long horizontal line.